

Double Duck is longest-serving state lawmaker

There are 252 metal steps leading to the top of the Capitol dome in Madison, Wis.

Some visitors might find the trip harrowing, or at least exhausting. But University of Oregon law school alum Fred Risser – the longest-serving state legislator in the United States – handles them without breaking a sweat.

At 85 years old, Risser was [featured recently](http://www.npr.org/2013/02/27/172431659/at-85-old-school-politician-shows-no-signs-of-quitting) (<http://www.npr.org/2013/02/27/172431659/at-85-old-school-politician-shows-no-signs-of-quitting>) by National Public Radio as part of its focus on people working past 65.

Risser (UO '50, '52) has been representing the city of Madison in the Wisconsin Legislature since 1956.

He's part of four generations of legislators in the Risser family, NPR reported: His father, Fred E.

Risser was a state senator; his grandfather, Ernest Warner, was an assembly member; and his great-

grandfather, Clement Warner, was a state senator and assembly member following the Civil War.

"I was born with a political spoon in my mouth," Risser told NPR. "When I was born I think my dad was district attorney. He was state senator for 12 years. As a kid, I used to help him campaign. I had great love for my dad. I knew I was going to follow in his footsteps."

Risser can recall positive changes in the Legislature over the years – the introduction of female and minority lawmakers, for example. Other changes aren't as encouraging.

"The Legislature is more polarized than I've ever seen it," Risser told NPR. "There are more straight party-line votes than there have ever been."

Risser acknowledges that some trends have passed him by – he doesn't have Facebook pages, doesn't tweet and doesn't text. He'd rather write something down than use e-mail.

But he rides 2,000 miles a year on a bike and he's kept the confidence of his fellow senate Democrats, who have elected him senate president when they've had the majority.

Over the years, Risser has helped pass laws to curb smoking, promote women's rights, clean up

APRIL 5, 2013



http://around.uoregon.edu/sites/around-628.wc-sites.uoregon.edu/files/1_risser-Law.jpg

Risser (right) with law school Dean Michael Moffitt at Reunions 2012

the rivers and increase mass transit. He also helped pass a bill to allow public employees to unionize, NPR said.

In 2011, Republican Gov. Scott Walker pushed through a bill rescinding most collective bargaining rights for Wisconsin state employees. Risser was one of 14 Wisconsin senators who left the state for three weeks to prevent a vote on the bill. In his district it made him a hero, NPR said.

"The bill that the governor gutted was one I had helped put through 50 years ago," Risser told NPR.

"Fred is an institution within an institution," said Jeff Mayers, who heads WisPolitics.com and has covered Risser's career for 20 years.

"He is still doing the work," he added. "If he wasn't doing the work, somebody would be after him."

Quite the opposite. Risser was re-elected in November, running unopposed.

"It's the most frustrating job in the world, but it keeps the adrenalin going and it gets you up in the morning," Risser told NPR. "You learn something new every day."

-- from the UO Office of Strategic Communications, based on NPR reporting